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Metal No Problem for Bird Preserve

But Kennecott Study Says Problems Could Arise in Drain Ditch

By Jim Woolf
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Selenium is not likely to cause problems for birds using a 2,500-acre nature preserve that Kennecott has proposed near the south shore of the Great Salt Lake, according to a new study.

Company officials early this year offered to develop the preserve to replace about 1,000 acres of mud flats, ponds and marshes that would be lost to expansion of the massive tailings pile near Magna.

However, questions arose after water samples from a pond in the proposed nature preserve showed

elevated levels of selenium — a metal that can cause serious reproductive problems in waterfowl and shorebirds. No one wanted to attract birds to an unhealthy area.

But a new study done for Kennecott has found no evidence of problems among the birds that use the area. Indeed, selenium levels at the proposed preserve are comparable to that found at the Farmington Bay and Timpie Springs waterfowl-management areas — areas with apparently healthy populations of birds.

Birds are exposed to selenium by feeding on contaminated fish and insects that live in the water. However, Kennecott's studies showed these small organisms are relatively clean at the proposed preserve.

"We feel very confident there is not a problem now, and the situa-

tion will only get better" when the preserve is developed, said Elaine J. Dorward-King, director of environmental affairs for Kennecott.

The improvement will come from the company's plans to run fresh water through the preserve to improve habitat for wildlife. This will flush out ponds where the highest selenium levels were recorded.

Potentially hazardous selenium levels could develop in the "C7 ditch," according to the study. The ditch currently collects water from a number of areas around the tailings pile and carries it to the Great Salt Lake just north of Saltair Resort.

If the tailings pile is enlarged, most of this water would be rerouted to other areas. The only water left in the ditch would come

from several springs near the north tip of the Oquirrh Mountains, springs that contain high levels of selenium.

Birds nesting and feeding along this ditch could be exposed to levels high enough to cause problems, according to the report.

There should be no risk after the ditch water flows into the Great Salt Lake, said the report, because of dilution and chemical changes caused by the salty water.

Dorward-King said researchers are continuing to study the C7 ditch situation. If the results are verified, they may recommend covering the ditch to keep wildlife out, or recycling the contaminated water through the company's production process.

"I'm impressed by the homework they've done," said Wayne Martinson, Utah wetlands coordinator for the National Audubon Society. "The concern regarding selenium was, in my mind at least, greatly decreased."

UVSC On I For Training

Utah Valley State College launched Indusnet, an on-line guide compiling information on educational and training sources available in 10 West states.

"Our goal was nothing short of a communitywide access for users to continuous lifelong education or training resulting in better work skills and more productive employees," UVSC President Kerry Romesburg said.

The project was conceived by Utah-based educational and business consortium, The InterMountain Manufacturing Education and Training Partnership, initially funded by the National Science Foundation.

This project incorporates,